

# Different Heads for Different Drummers

by Bob Saydlowski, Jr.

The shell material of a drum is responsible for a lot of the general sound, but the main sound maker is the drum head. By using different types and weights of heads, or combinations thereof, completely different tonal textures can be achieved.

The first heads used by drummers were animal skins stretched over hollow logs. Drummers later on in time used calfskin heads which yielded a warm, mellow tone. But a major problem with these heads was that they constantly had to be re-tuned due to changes in humidity and temperature. The revolutionary design of the plastic drum head gradually phased out production of calfskin heads, even though many drummers were reluctant to change over.

Plastic drum heads are available in a variety of sizes, weights and types and they are virtually unaffected by weather conditions. Each has its own tonal characteristics. Generally, the sound of a coated head is of the shortest duration, longer with a smooth-white head, and longest with a transparent head. Batter heads range from the thin weight (very sensitive) to the medium (all purpose) and up to the two-ply weight (used primarily for marching drums, but effective in certain rock situations).

Remo makes the drum heads for most of the world's drum manufacturers. At present, they make eight different types of heads: *coated*, *transparent*, *smooth white*, *snare side*, *Soundmaster*, *Controlled Sound*, *FiberSkyn*, and *PinStripe*. *Controlled Sound* (C.S.) heads have a circular black patch laminated to the bat-

ter side of the head which adds half the thickness of the head at point of impact. Available in white or clear, the C.S. heads are designed to control unwanted overtones/ring. A 14" C.S. head is also made for brush work with a coated batter side. The patch is adhered to the underside.

*FiberSkyn* heads come in thin and medium weights. They are a combination of plastic and fiberglass fabric, probably made to appease the die-hard users of calfskin heads. *FiberSkyns* have a warm, round tone like calfskin, but hold up much better than the old calfskin heads did. They also control overtones to a certain point.

Remo's newest head is the *PinStripe*. Two layers of transparent Emperor-weight Mylar are bonded together at the collar with a special coating applied at the bond. These heads give a controlled muffle that goes beyond the C.S. heads. Especially good for recording, the *PinStripe* heads eliminate the need for felt or tape on the drumhead to get a wet, flat sound. One problem I've found, though, is that the weight of *PinStripe* heads is somewhat erratic. Some differ in the thickness of the bonding around the perimeter of the hoop. Check three or four *PinStripes* before you make your final purchase.

Ludwig makes heads similar to the Remo line-up: coated, clear, smooth-white, snare, and controlled sound. Their controlled sound head is called *Silver Dot* and has a mirrored patch instead of a black one. The plastic on the *Silver Dot* heads seems to be a little heavier

than Remo's plastic, and therefore adds a little more punch to tom-toms. Ludwig has just introduced a new series of drumheads: *Rockers*, *Groovers*, *Striders*, and *Ensemble*. These heads are designed for specific uses: rock, jazz, marching, and orchestral. They've also come out with *White Dot* heads. The *Rocker White Dots* are a little thicker than *Silver Dots* and can cut down even more overtones. They can really take a pounding.

Evans drumheads have seamless, polyester hoops unlike the seamed Remo and Ludwig metal hoops. Evans has a valid point when they say that the metal hoop's weakest point is at the seam and that the metal-to-metal contact between head hoop and counterhoop gives an unnatural sound. After all, we use nylon or rubber sleeves on metal cymbal tilters, right? Evans makes the regular thin, medium and heavy gauge heads, but are mainly known for their two-ply *Rock* heads and hydraulic heads. The hydraulic heads have a filling of oil between the two plys that kills the overtones. They are almost impossible to dent and seem to be the favorite of many recording studios. The hydraulic heads give a very flat sound which makes studio and live miking a lot easier. Evans has different colors, including clear, blue, red, gold, and a mirror-finish head for people with chrome drum kits. They all have hoops belted with fiberglass so the head will conform with the shell of the drum and fit tightly.

Canasonic also makes flexible hoops with one-piece, fiberglass-plastic skin. They have a deeper sound than regular

Mylar heads and come in four types: *Regular*, *Snare*, *No-overtone*, and *Sound Dot*. The *No-overtone* head has exactly the characteristics its name says, and is also used in studios to prevent over-ringing. Unlike mylar, fiberglass does not stretch. Since fiberglass has a tensile strength of between 40,000-50,000 pounds per square inch, it is possible to achieve the tension desired without fear of pocking the head from heavy playing. Unlike the Remo *C.S.* and Ludwig *Dots* the Canasonic *Sound Dot* has the dot as an integral part of the drum head, because it is molded in rather than being stuck on. Canasonic heads and *Sound Dots* come in seven different colors (plus black and white), allowing the drummer to color coordinate his entire set.

By the way, you can also make your own dot heads out of regular heads by purchasing stick-on dot patches, available in many different sizes.

Actually, there are over 50 different types and weights of heads on the market, so there's all sorts of combinations for top and bottom heads. Only your ears can tell what is best for you. After experimentation, you'll find the type that is best suited to your needs. With so many types of drumheads to choose from, it may take a few years.

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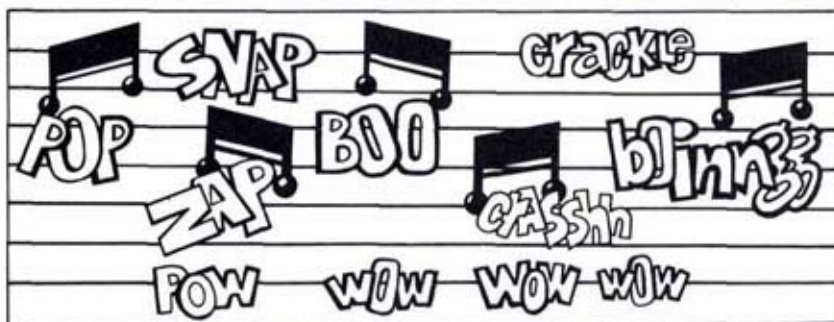
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